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University of Kentucky
College of Agriculture,
Food and Environment
Cooperative Extension Service

Mastering Food Choices

Modifying Recipes

Your favorite recipes can be modified to increase nutrition. To make recipe modification a common practice, we should frequently think about how increasing the nutrition of our recipes relates to our health. For example, lowering the amount of sodium in the diet over time through small recipe modifications may reduce risk of high blood pressure and heart disease.

How to Modify Recipes

First, identify the ingredient in the recipe that is unhealthy or should be modified. Common recipe ingredients that could be modified include items high in sodium, sugar, trans fats, and saturated fats. It may be necessary to read the nutrition facts label to identify unhealthy food components in the recipe.

In the following suggestions, unhealthy ingredients will either be replaced or reduced, or the cooking method will be modified.

- Replace unhealthy food components with comparable, healthier products.

  Example: Replacing salt with other herbs or salt-free seasonings in a vegetable dish

- Enhance nutrition by replacing an ingredient with little nutritional value with a nutrient-dense item.

  Example: Replacing refined grain pasta in pasta salad with whole grain pasta

- Reduce the overall amount of an unhealthy ingredient.

  Example: Reducing the amount of sugar by half in your baked goods

- Modify the cooking method.

  Example: Baking homemade French fries rather than deep frying

Table 1. Ingredient substitution examples		
Recipe suggestions	**Modification**	**Form of modification**
Spread butter or shortening on pan to avoid sticking	Brush with oil, use non-stick pans, or cooking spray.	Modify cooking method
Creamed soups	Pureed veggies for thickening	Enhance nutrition
Cream cheese	Non-fat or low-fat option, pureed cottage cheese	Replace unhealthy food
Chicken/beef broth	Reduced sodium option	Reduce unhealthy nutrient
Salt	Experiment with other spices, herbs, or salt-free seasoning mixes.	Replace unhealthy food
Sugar	Reduce amount by half. (Ratio: ¼ cup sugar to 1 cup flour)	Reduce unhealthy nutrient

Trial and Error

Many people will try to modify recipes to increase the nutritional content but become discouraged when recipes do not turn out how they had hoped. Successfully modifying recipes takes practice and experimentation. It is usually best to modify ingredients one at a time. Casseroles, soups, side dishes, salads, and entrees are easiest to modify. Baked goods may require more careful substitutions. The chemistry of the recipe changes when we substitute ingredients, so staying open-minded about the finished product will help you be successful in the kitchen.

The Differences Small Changes Can Make

Below is an example where an original recipe was modified to increase the nutritional value and reduce the intake of unhealthy ingredients and calories. As you can see, small changes in the ingredients makes a substantial difference in the nutrition information provided.

Resources

eXtension

Herb & Spice Guide. *http://articles.extension.org/mediawiki/files/7/7a/Herb_and_Spice_Guide.pdf.*

Recipe Substitutions. http://articles.extension.org/pages/32348/recipe-substitutions.

References

Oregon State University Klamath Basin Research and Extension Center. Plateful of Prevention: Preparing Delicious Meals. http://oregonstate.edu/dept/kbrec/plateful-prevention.

Heather Norman-Burgdolf, Ph.D., Dietetics and Human Nutrition

Original: Carrot Cake Sandwich Cookies

Yield: 25 sandwiches
Serving: 1 sandwich
Ingredients:
1 cup packed light-brown sugar
1 cup granulated sugar
½ pound (2 sticks) unsalted butter, room temperature
2 large eggs, room temperature
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
2 cups all-purpose flour
1 tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. baking powder
¼ tsp. salt
1 tsp. ground cinnamon
½ tsp. nutmeg
½ tsp. ground ginger
2 cups old fashioned oats
1 ½ cups finely grated carrots, (about 3 large carrots)
1 cup raisins
Directions:
Heat oven to 350° degrees. Combine sugars and butter; beat until light and fluffy. Add eggs and vanilla, and beat on medium speed until well combined. In a large bowl, combine flour, baking soda, baking powder, salt, cinnamon, nutmeg, and ginger. Gradually add flour to butter mixture until just blended. Mix in oats, carrots, and raisins. Chill dough in refrigerator at least 1 hour. Using a ½-ounce ice-cream scoop, scoop dough onto prepared baking sheets and bake until browned, rotating pan halfway through baking, 12 to 15 minutes. Once cooled, use a spatula to spread about 2 teaspoons of cream cheese filling onto a cookie. Sandwich together with a second cookie. Store in an airtight container for up to 3 days in the refrigerator.
Nutrition Information:
200 calories
8 g fat
4.5 g saturated fat
30 mg cholesterol
100 mg sodium
30 g carbohydrate
1 g fiber
19 g sugars
3 g protein

Modified: Carrot Cake Sandwich Cookies

Yield: 4 dozen cookies
Serving: 1 cookie
Ingredients:
½ cup packed light-brown sugar
½ cup sugar
½ cup oil
½ cup applesauce or fruit puree
2 eggs
1 tsp. vanilla
1 cup flour
1 cup whole-wheat flour
1 tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. baking powder
¼ tsp. salt
1 tsp. ground cinnamon
½ tsp. ground nutmeg
½ tsp. ground ginger
2 cups old-fashioned rolled oats
1 ½ cups finely grated carrots (about 3 large carrots)
1 cup raisins
Directions:
Heat oven to 350° F. Mix sugars, oil, applesauce, eggs and vanilla thoroughly. Blend dry ingredients into wet mixture. Stir in raisins and carrots. Drop by teaspoonfuls on greased cookie sheets. Bake 12-15 minutes until golden brown. Rotate cookie sheet half way through baking process to insure even cooking. Store in airtight container or freeze.
Nutrition Information:
70 calories
2.5 g fat
0 g saturated fat
5 mg cholesterol
50 mg sodium
11 g carbohydrate
1 g fiber
5 g sugars
1 g protein